

2004-2005 Flu Season Questions and Answers

Why is there a shortage of flu vaccine this season?

On October 5, 2004, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was notified by Chiron Corporation, the world's second-leading flu vaccine supplier, that none of its influenza vaccine (Fluvirin®) would be available for distribution in the United States for the 2004–05 influenza season.

The company indicated that the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the United Kingdom, where Chiron's Fluvirin vaccine is produced, has suspended the company's license to manufacture Fluvirin vaccine in its Liverpool facility for 3 months, preventing any release of the vaccine for this influenza season. This action will reduce by approximately one half the expected supply of trivalent inactivated vaccine (flu shot) available in the United States for the 2004–05 influenza season.

How much flu vaccine will be available in the United States this season?

About 55 million flu shots will be available in the United States this season. In addition, about 1 million doses of the nasal flu vaccine, FluMist®, will be available.

How much flu vaccine will be available in Hawaii this season?

It is unknown at this time how much flu vaccine is available in Hawaii for the 2004-2005 season. The Hawaii State Department of Health is currently working with immunization providers and healthcare organizations to identify gaps in vaccine supply and to determine a method to distribute the limited supply of flu vaccine to those at high risk for serious complications from the flu.

Who should get vaccinated this season?

Because of the shortage of flu vaccine for this season, CDC is recommending that people at high risk for serious complications from the flu be given priority for getting the flu shot. The priority groups are:

- All children aged 6–23 months;
- Adults aged 65 years and older;
- Persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions;
- All women who will be pregnant during the flu season;
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities;
- Children aged 6 months-18 years on chronic aspirin therapy;
- Health-care workers involved in direct patient care;
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children younger than 6 months

Where can people in the priority groups go to get the flu shot?

Persons who fall into one of the priority groups listed above should contact their doctor about getting the flu shot. If their doctor does not have flu vaccine, they should call 2-1-1 or visit www.vaxhawaii.com for a clinic nearby.

Will people who are not in a priority group be able to get a flu shot?

People who are not included in one of the priority groups listed above are asked to step aside and not get a flu shot this season. This will help to ensure that the limited supply of vaccine will be available for people at highest risk for serious complications from the flu.

What other steps can be taken to prevent the flu?

There are other good health habits that can help prevent the flu. These are:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- Wash your hands often to help protect yourself from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

What do I do if I think I have the flu?

If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and wash your hands often to avoid spreading germs to others. Call your doctor right away if you think that you have the flu. Medications are available that can reduce the symptoms of the flu.